DIVERSITY NEWS
July 2007

Yvonne: Whether it's concerning organizational performance, teamwork, or diversity management—all topics we've addressed before in previous editions of Diversity News—leadership plays a key role in the success, or failure, of these collaborative efforts.

Thomas: When it comes to diversity management, the power of an organization's leaders in creating the organization's values, environment, culture, and actions is immeasurable.

Yvonne: Diversity management must be driven by the leadership of the organization. An organization can have great policies on paper but, unless managers all the way to the top "walk the talk" and apply those policies fairly and consistently, it will never make the grade as a great place to work.

Thomas: In this edition of Diversity News, we'll be looking at effective diversity leadership, the diversity leader's key responsibilities for driving change and inclusion; and the competencies they require to carry out those responsibilities.

Yvonne: In "The Diversity Executive: Tasks, Competencies, and Strategies for Effective Leadership" by Michael L. Wheeler, members of the Conference Board's Diversity Councils identify seven key areas under which the primary tasks of the diversity leader fall.

These include: Strategic direction; Integration of diversity into key business and human resources practices, initiatives, and objectives; External relations; Communication; Consulting and executive coaching; Relationship building; and measurement and accountability.

Thomas: Strategic direction is the alignment of diversity with business objectives and goals related to the marketplace, talent, and organizational effectiveness.

This includes: Establishing the organization's vision, philosophy, and direction; Articulating the business case for diversity; Envisioning the future; Establishing strategic focus and objectives by linking diversity to organizational objectives; Creating and developing an infrastructure to implement strategy; Establishing the organization's definition of diversity; Determining the strategic needs; and utilizing a Diversity Council for organization-wide commitment and leadership.

Yvonne: Integration of diversity into key business practices, initiatives, and objectives is best achieved when the diversity leader establishes a clear link between diversity and business goals and objectives.

Integration of diversity into key human resources practices, initiatives, and objectives includes aligning diversity with: Recruiting; Upward mobility and advancement; Development; Training; Compensation and benefits; Succession planning; and labor relations.

Thomas: External relations relates to how the diversity leader must establish partnerships and relationships with key stakeholders in communities, educational institutions, and advocacy organizations.

The diversity leader is often a critical link between the organization and communities, educational institutions, and advocacy organizations.

According to Conference Board Diversity Council members, an important task of the diversity leader is to identify key stakeholders in all of these areas and to establish partnerships and relationships. These are not only goodwill initiatives, but are also considered important business opportunities.

Yvonne: Communication serves the diversity leader as a strategy for conveying the issues and the business case; driving change and apprising progress; improving relationships and teamwork; informing constituents; and modeling the process.

This includes: Developing a communication strategy for key stakeholders and having an internal and external plan; Having ongoing communication about strategic direction, progress, and results; Creating mechanisms for dialogue and feedback loops to reassess and change direction; Building an internal diversity image advertising campaign; and developing strategies for external recognition (for example through award programs like Fortune's Best, Working Mother, and Catalyst Awards).

Thomas: Consulting and executive coaching refer to how the diversity leader is often an advisor on diversity issues, and also assists in the professional development of executives with respect to diversity.

This includes: Establishing leadership standards, expectations, and behaviors; Conducting assessments and 360-degree feedback of self and others; Guiding discovery and leading by open and nonjudgmental inquiry; Establishing trusting relationships; Confronting people honestly; Coaching to resolve a problem; and bringing people up to speed when they don't "get it."

Yvonne: The diversity leader is typically dependent upon organization-wide relationships to drive change and commitment to diversity issues and initiatives.

Internal individuals that the diversity leader needs to build relationships with may include: Direct reports; Diversity councils or committees; The Board of Directors; and employee networking or affinity groups.

External individuals or organizations that the diversity leader needs to build relationships with may include: Vendor relations; Community leaders; Civil rights organizations; and professional organizations.

Thomas: Measurement and accountability refers to the diversity leader being responsible for: Achieving business objectives, measuring success, driving change, and linking diversity to business performance; Establishing meaningful business metrics that are both qualitative and quantitative—with regard to how diversity may link to the bottom line and how environmental and other issues may be affecting employee satisfaction and productivity; Recording, monitoring, and communicating progress; Holding people accountable with both positive and negative consequences; Establishing accountability systems linked to compensation; and integrating diversity into formal reward and recognition processes.

Yvonne: According to members of the Conference Board's Diversity Councils, there are seven competencies required to carry out the diversity leader's key responsibilities. They are the same as for any good business leader.

These include: Business acumen (knowing all aspects of the business); Strong and visionary leadership (maintaining long-term goals and commitment amid short-term, quarterly objectives); Large system change skills (knowing skills, tools, and theories of change); Results orientation (the ability to measure and set specific short- and long-term goals); Building and maintaining credibility, from both business and personal perspectives; The ability to influence (knowing who, where, and how to drive change and commitment); and commitment to diversity and inclusion (believing that it is not only "the right thing to do," but the right thing for business).

Thomas: There are two key considerations concerning the competency of business acumen: the diversity executive must understand elements of every component of the business, and must help business leaders in every function understand the implications of diversity for the business.

This competency includes: Understanding critical success factors of the business; Understanding the culture and history of the organization; Knowing how work gets done formally and informally; Recognizing the Pareto Principle—knowing the 20 percent you need to effect 80 percent change; Collaborating within and outside the organization; Having an overall knowledge of the HR practices and systems and how they support the business objective; Being the catalyst for making the connection between social and political pressure points within the organization; and being aware of the external pressure points (whether those are social, environmental, or regulatory).

Yvonne: Having strong and visionary leadership skills refers to possessing the ability to see the potential of the business, and how diversity can help its achievement.

To have strong and visionary leadership skills, diversity leaders must: Know what is really important; Be charismatic; Demonstrate credibility; Have or create a proven track record of competence; Demonstrate concern for the individual and the team; Know how to operationalize a vision; Engender respect from internal and external audiences; Know where appropriate resources are and how to utilize them; Communicate effectively across all levels of the organization; Be able to influence at all levels and functions throughout the organization; and articulate and assist others in understanding where the organization wants to go.

Thomas: Large system change skills are about realizing the kind of workplace where everyone can fully participate. This requires the diversity leader to be skilled at methods of organization change and assessment.

This also requires having a strong understanding of the dynamics and theory of change, as well as influence and communication ability. Vision and values statements are also important to this change process.

This competency includes: Knowing methods for assessing an organization, and making changes based on that assessment; Understanding the dynamics and theory of change; Knowing how to get buy-in to support the change in the organization; Possessing and demonstrating high energy and focus; Clearly communicating expectations and benefits of diversity and initiatives; Understanding trends for the business and being able to interpret them; Understanding and being able to define work initiatives, issues, and terminology such as e-business and face-time; and understanding how to harness technology as a resource and a tool.

Yvonne: Another competency the diversity leader must possess is having a results orientation. Although much of the work is long-term, and success may often seem incremental, it is important that the diversity leader identify tactics that can be achieved, demonstrated, and measured. This assists in helping the leader to keep the vision and momentum, while also providing deliverables to BUSINESS leaders who are accustomed to, and expect, results.

This competency includes: Defining goals, knowing how to attain those goals, and seeking the right results; Linking diversity to business needs and strategies; Communicating results in terms of impact; Linking to the bottom line; Getting buy-in (and sharing success); Maintaining a balanced perspective on unique needs in the organization (the dimension of diversity) and realizing that not everyone is the same, hence needs will be different for different groups; Not settling for the status quo; and working collaboratively with multidimensional teams.

Thomas: The competency of building and maintaining credibility in the organization, both internally and externally, is achieved through a variety of methods. There are two key perspectives: the business standpoint and the personal-interpersonal perspective.

This competency includes: Acting with integrity; Building confidence at all levels; Being perceived as fair; Valuing and maintaining confidentiality; Delivering; Being willing to take an unpopular stand; and not colluding through silence.

Yvonne: The ability to influence is dependent upon credibility, business acumen, vision, and the other competencies that we've already identified. It involves political savvy and sensitivity—knowing when to influence and when not to influence. Influence is built through alliances, and formal training in negotiation skills is always helpful.

This competency includes: Negotiating; Persuading; Having an in-depth understanding of business organization and culture; Being politically savvy; Navigating organization turf; and being able to manage a crisis.

Thomas: Finally, the essential competency—commitment to diversity and inclusion—is the first indicator that sets the diversity leader apart from the typical business leader. There is the assumption for all involved that this is not only the right thing to do, but the right thing for business. Because of this, there is typically a strong personal commitment to the work.

This competency includes: Aligning personal values with work requirements, and vice-versa; Valuing alignment (the nature of work); Conducting self-exploration for self-awareness (understanding own issues); Knowing issues and impact of marginalization; Commitment to continuous learning about diversity and inclusion; Model and practice; Having empathy for a broad range of perspectives; and being courageous.

Thomas: You can find more information about the Conference Board's diversity-related conferences, councils, reports, and other publications on their Web site at www.conference-board.org.

But that's all we have time for in this edition of Diversity News. We appreciate your watching, and we hope you'll tune in again next month.

Until then, for more frequent updates of diversity news, sign up for our free weekly e-mail news service: NewsLink. Just send an e-mail message to dmeeo@va.gov, with the words "Subscribe News" in the subject line.

Yvonne: And check out our bimonthly newsletter, Diversity@Work, available as a download on our Web site or by e-mail from our office.

Also, we want to hear from YOU! If you'd like to share your story ideas, comments, or suggestions, please e-mail us at dmeeo@va.gov with the words "Diversity News" in the subject line.

Until next time…

Both: Have a great month!